

# Barbara Kay: Neither sex has a monopoly on victimization

Tuesday October 2nd, 2012



A member of the Canadian Forces salutes during a candlelight vigil at a cemetery in the Canadian National Vimy Memorial Park in Vimy

In the [Letters](#) section today, Daniela Lobo of Toronto, responding to my defence of Rona Ambrose's affirmative vote for Motion 312, which would permit a discussion on when human life begins, poses the question, "Does the government have the right to impose regulations on a woman's body?" She does not believe it should. To bolster her case, she poses another question: "When was the last time the government tried to impose regulations on a man's body?"

The last question is more easily answered by posing it in the negative. "When was the last time the government did *not* impose regulations on a man's body?" The answer is, in Canada and pretty well everywhere else, never. I speak of course of conscription for military service. Although the last military draft was in World War Two, Canada reserves the right to draft men into combat at any time if there is an attack on our country. If drafting a man into combat is not a "regulation" on his body, I would like to know what is.

Even in countries where women are drafted, they are not obliged to serve in combat. A woman who is not permitted to have an abortion after 18 weeks of pregnancy may endure several months of inconvenience until the baby is born and given away, but a man whose body has been put at the service of the state in combat not only suffers extreme inconvenience every minute of every day of his service, normally a much longer period than pregnancy, he runs a very high risk of ending up maimed or dead.

But I am not surprised to see Ms. Lobo's question posed, because the wrongs men do are front and centre in our cultural consciousness, but the sacrifices men make — and expect to make as a matter of course — are taken for granted by many women.

This interesting gendered blindness can be illustrated by a review of the wonderful British TV series, *Downton Abbey*, that I read some months ago by the *Montreal Gazette's* resident militant feminist. This columnist made the point that in the World War One era, the setting for the series, times were very tough for women. She adduced as a prime example one of the characters, a young woman of the lower classes, who has been impregnated and then abandoned by a man of the upper class. He refuses to acknowledge his child or pay any support. The young woman is in a terrible position, socially disgraced of course and condemned to penury.

What the columnist failed to note is that in that era, life was very tough for men as well, and that the well-balanced series made that reality very clear. Because, you see, there was a draft, and men were falling like flies in battle. In the very same series in which the columnist only saw the travails of women, there are several male characters with heartbreaking stories: one is a valet, permanently disabled from a previous war, who cannot get a divorce from his shrew of a wife, who for spite deliberately implicates him as her murderer when she commits suicide; one is a young boy who is brought home mortally wounded from the front, gasping his love for the parlour maid he had wanted to marry through gassed lungs before he expires; another is a footman, so terrified in the heat of battle, he shoots himself in the hand to be released and then endures months of shell shock during which he must continue working, his body shaking uncontrollably, as best he can, with virtually no sympathy or comprehension of what he is going through.

*Downton Abbey* also shows a balanced view of the upper classes. True, in that era, upper class women led boring and superficial lives as they made the social rounds before finding a suitable husband, but upper class men were also locked in to prescribed roles. If they were estate owners, they could not go into business or take up medicine or law — indeed, the protagonist is a middle class kinsman of the estate-holding family, whose lack of a male heir made him the closest relative and therefore obliged him to give up his law career — and their lives didn't seem to be a barrel of laughs either.

So the answer to Ms Lobo's question is: Both sexes have bodies. Throughout human history the primary purpose of those bodies has been divided between reproduction of the species and protection of those who reproduce the species. Both sexes have suffered for their purpose. No sex has a monopoly on victimization. That's not what this discussion is about.

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